

Gulf of Mexico Greater Amberjack and Gray Triggerfish

Proposed Amendment 30A Management Measures

Frequently Asked Questions

January 2008

Why is NOAA Fisheries Service proposing to implement new measures in the Gulf of Mexico greater amberjack and gray triggerfish fisheries?

- The most recent greater amberjack stock assessment indicates the stock continues to be overfished and is undergoing overfishing, compromising the objectives of the current Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) rebuilding plan.
- Gray triggerfish are also undergoing overfishing, but the overfished status is currently unknown because the Council has yet to define an overfished threshold.
- Adjusted catch levels and harvesting restrictions are proposed to rebuild these stocks and end overfishing. Additionally, management targets and thresholds for gray triggerfish will be set.

What are rebuilding plans and why are they necessary?

The Council must implement measures to rebuild overfished populations managed under a fishery management plan (FMP). A **rebuilding plan** is a strategy where the catch of a species is limited to a point where over time the population can rebuild. The time frame for a rebuilding plan should be as short as possible, considering the status and biology of the overfished population as well as the needs of fishing communities. No rebuilding plan can exceed 10 years unless biological or environmental conditions dictate otherwise. Rebuilding plans usually rely on annual landings to remain at or below a certain total allowable catch (TAC) and incorporate accountability measures to deal with overages.

What is TAC? TAC is the total amount of fish allowed to be caught from a particular stock by all resource users over a particular period of time.

What are accountability measures and why are they necessary?

If the TAC in a rebuilding plan is exceeded, the management strategies may fail to rebuild the stock within the designated time frame. NOAA Fisheries Service can implement emergency measures to bring the plan back on track, but this process is time consuming, the measures are temporary, and even with these measures overages could still occur. **Accountability measures** are management activities such as seasonal closures, decreased trip or bag limits, or adjustments to quotas that the Regional Administrator (RA) has the authority to enact as soon as possible to account for overages in landings.

Why didn't the Council address allocation of greater amberjack and gray triggerfish between the recreational and commercial sectors?

At their November 2007 meeting, the Council recognized the difficulties involved in this type of decision and established an Allocation Ad Hoc Committee to examine fair and equitable ways to allocate all FMP resources between recreational and commercial fisheries. Once completed, the principles for setting allocations should be more transparent and understandable to the various sectors in the fishery.

Can I comment on the proposed measures?

Yes. NOAA Fisheries Service will accept comments on the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) during a 45-day comment period which ends January 28, 2008. The DEIS evaluates the environmental consequences of the proposed actions and alternatives. There will be more comment periods as the rule is developed. You may submit comments, identified as 0648-AV34, by any one of the following methods:

- E-mail: 0648-AV34.DSEIS@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line the following document identifier: 0648-AV34-DSEIS
- Mail: Peter Hood, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701
- Fax: 727-824-5308, Attention: Peter Hood

Greater Amberjack

What are the preferred long-term measures to end greater amberjack overfishing and allow stock recovery? How do the proposed management measures differ from past measures?

MANAGEMENT ACTION	Existing Management Measures	Proposed Management Measures in Amendment 30A
Recreational bag limit	One fish/person/day (applies to captain & crew of for-hire vessels)	One fish/person/day (zero for captain & crew of for-hire vessels)
Recreational minimum size limit	28" fork length	31" fork length
Commercial minimum size limit	36" fork length	Same
Commercial fishing season	June 1–end of February	Same
Commercial quota	None	503,000 pounds 2008-2010; 938,000 pounds 2011-2012

What is the proposed rebuilding plan for greater amberjack?

The current rebuilding plan is a stepped process originally implemented in 2003. Over the first two years of the current plan, harvest has exceeded TAC by about 38 percent. The 2006 stock assessment indicated that a 50 percent reduction in fishing mortality is needed starting in 2008 to meet the rebuilding plan target. Under the proposed revisions to the rebuilding plan, directed TAC would be set to restrict the fishing mortality for each three-year interval. TAC would be 1.9 million pounds (mp) for 2008 through 2010 and 3.5 mp from 2011 through 2012. The Council selected this plan because it has

a greater than 50 percent probability of allowing the stock to recover by 2012 and is the most conservative of the alternatives.

What are the preferred accountability measures?

If annual landings for any sector exceed the annual share of TAC for that sector, the RA can reduce the length of the fishing season for that sector for the time necessary to recover the overage as soon as possible but not later than the end of the following fishing year. If a commercial quota is approved, the RA can reduce the commercial quota in the following year by the amount the quota was exceeded in the previous year.

Gray Triggerfish

What are the proposed long-term measures to end gray triggerfish overfishing and allow stock recovery? How do the proposed management measures differ from past measures?

MANAGEMENT ACTION	2007 Management Measures	Proposed Management Measures in Amendment 30A
Recreational minimum size limit	12" fork length	14" fork length
Recreational bag limit	Included in the 20 fish aggregate reef fish bag limit	Same
Commercial minimum size limit	12" total length	14" fork length
Commercial quota	None	80,000 pounds 2008; 93,000 pounds 2009; 106,000 pounds 2010; 117,000 pounds 2011; 127,000 pounds 2012; and 135,000 pounds 2013

What is the proposed rebuilding plan?

If the preferred overfished definition is approved, gray triggerfish would be overfished and therefore require a rebuilding plan. The proposed rebuilding plan would allow the stock to rebuild within six years. TAC would be set annually to keep fishing mortality at an acceptable level. TAC for 2008 would be 0.5 mp, TAC in 2009 would be 0.58 mp, TAC in 2010 would be 0.66 mp, TAC in 2011 would be 0.73 mp, and TAC in 2012 would be 0.79 mp. The Council selected this plan because it allows harvest to increase annually and should rebuild the stock in less than 10 years.

What are the proposed accountability measures?

If annual landings for any sector exceed the three-year running average TAC, the RA can reduce the length of the fishing season in the following fishing year for the sector experiencing the overage to return landings to the target annual TAC level. If a commercial quota is approved, the RA can reduce the commercial quota in the following fishing year by the amount the quota was exceeded in the previous year(s).